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ABSTRACT

A broad survey of democratic political attitudes of United States and West German students was developed jointly by the Governmental Education Division of the Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia and the Bundeszentrale fur politische Bildung in Bonn. This survey sought to probe twelfth-year students' attitudes toward national constitutional principles, political institutions, and political participation. The literature suggested in 1984 that in recent years West German secondary school students had become increasingly more democratic in their attitudes while United States high school students appeared to be in a period of shifting attitudes. For the purposes of this report 20 items concerning attitudes towards the rights of individuals have been selected for analysis from the 80-item summary. Although the pattern of response was somewhat different on a number of items, responses of American and German students were significantly different on only 7 of the 20 items on rights of individuals. Current conflicts between economic realities and political ideals may be at the root of different attitudes for students in both societies, but these may be more substantive for the German students who, by the nature of their political culture, tend to be more ideological in their thinking. (BZ)

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COMPARISON OF POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF GERMAN AND AMERICAN TWELFTH YEAR STUDENTS: PERSPECTIVES ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS

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COMPARISON OF POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF GERMAN AND AMERICAN TWELFTH YEAR STUDENTS: PERSPECTIVES ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS

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Introduction

The research which is the basis for this paper was conceived at an international conference in 1983. Several German and American political education researchers discussed studies of the past decade which had examined political attitudes of German and American youth as we reviewed educational programs in both countries aimed at strengthening the understanding of democratic processes. Questions about possible shifting attitudes were raised, and we wondered what student attitudes we would find in the mid-eighties in these two constitutional democracies.

By 1984, a joint research project was born. It is a cooperative venture between the Governmental Education Division of the Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia and the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn.[1] We worked together to develop a broad survey of democratic political attitudes for students in their 12th year of school (16-18 year olds). Specifically, in the 80-item survey, we sought to probe attitudes toward national constitutional principles, toward political institutions, and toward political participation. Within each of these general attitude clusters we sought to examine personal/general (I/other) dimensions of attitudes.

One attitude area that interested us was an item set focused on guarantees and protections of individual rights. These items were part of a subtest

measuring attitudes related to democratic constitutional principles. Responses of twenty items on rights and freedoms have been selected for discussion in this paper. The report is based on an initial frequency analysis of the data from both nations. This fall and winter more extensive analyses will be computed to determine scale and subtest scores and make cross-cultural comparisons by scales and by gender.

Background Literature

Comparative research on the political attitudes of German and American youths following World War II was predominantly focused on authoritarianism and ethnocentrism. Just after the war McGranahan (1946) using an eight-item survey found that German adolescents were more authoritarian than American adolescents. He found that German youths were far more in favor of obedience to authority than to independent decision-making and independent action when compared to American youths. And, German youths showed considerably more admiration for men of great power then did the Americans. Overall, McGranahan found that even after the defeat of the war, German youths had stronger attitudes of ethnocentrism and "national superiority" than did American youths tested in the study.

McGranahan's findings were reinforced in the fifties by a broader study by Cohn and Corsch (1954) using the F-scale to compare German and American workers' attitudes. They reported much higher levels of authoritarianism in the German responses. In 1969 American and German college students in professional teacher education programs were compared on authoritarianism and dogmatism scales by Shaver et.al (1971), and the German students scored significantly higher on both scales. (Possible design problems with this study should be noted, however, with 170 German elementary teacher education students compared to 1000 American students in secondary teacher education.)

By the mid seventies we begin to find a very different comparative profile of the democratic attitudes of German and American youths. A major cross-national survey sponsored by the International Education Association examined the civic education of students in ten countries (Torney, et al.,1975). They found that West German students scored highest on a cluster of scales measuring "support for democratic values;" U.S. students, on the other hand, had the lowest scores. In 1978 Merelman and Foster reviewed a variety of evidence and concluded that support for democratic values, such as tolerance and freedom of expression, had increased considerably in the German political culture of the seventies. By this time there was also evidence that political socialization patterns in West German families had become more democratic and thus more similar to those found in the U.S. and Britain (Jennings, et al., 1979)

From cross-cultural studies of college students in several "western nations," including West Germany and the U.S., Kerlinger (1978) and Sidanius et al. (1979) found a high degree of similarity in socio-political attitudes. They posited substantial similarities in political ideological profiles of students in these nations.

In 1979 the McGranahan survey was replicated by Lederer (1982) as part of a set of surveys designed to update political comparisons of German-American adolescents. She found a signficant decrease in the degree of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism among German students since 1945. Her study also showed a decrease in authoritarianism and ethnocentrism among American adolescents over this period of time, **but** the decrease was greater among students in the Federal Republic of Germany. Lederer noted, in the discussion of test responses, that there were differences in test behavior on the part of the German students. When asked to rate their nationality as better or worse than other listed nationalities, many students crossed out, omitted or objected to the item in

marginal notes. Said Lederer the subjects were "expressing their independence of the authority of the tester as well as the test situation" (308).

Eisenberg et al. (1985), in a study of prosocial moral judgment of elementary students, found that German children were quite similar to American children and reasoned that there are basic similarities in the socialization of children in the two political cultures which produce similar moral judgments.

Since the mid-seventies in both the FRG and the U.S., civic education curriculum materials have been developed with the expressed aim of increasing political knowledge and needed skills for a democratic society. A notable difference has been the inclusion of analysis of major current political issues in the West German materials, while American materials are heavy on structure, functions and political history.

Within the U.S. a recent study of student political attitudes revealed some interesting changes in American student attitudes towards rights and freedoms. Elam (1984) replicated in 1983 a survey conducted in the 1951 Purdue Opinion Polls of American high school seniors. The 15 items in the survey paraphrased guarantees of the Bill of Rights in the U. S. Constitution. Results of the 1951 research indicated that students were willing to abridge many of their rights. Elam reported that seniors in the 1983 survey also were willing to abridge some rights. A larger percentage in 1983, compared to 1951, were willing to allow a police search without a warrant, to deny legal counsel to criminals, and to accept restrictions on religious freedom. Several years earlier, in our own research into the political attitudes of American students (Hepburn and Napier, 1983) we found evidence of conflicts and doubts about American political values, especially among high school seniors.

To summarize, then, as we prepared to conduct our study in 1984-85, the literature suggested to us that in recent years West German secondary school students had become increasingly more democratic in their attitudes. American

high school students, on the other hand, appeared to be in a period of shifting attitudes and might possibly be relatively less democratic in their attitudes.

Method

The study was planned as a cross-sectional survey to obtain descriptions of the political attitudes of students in their twelfth year of schooling in several areas of the United States and of the Federal Republic of Germany and make comparisons.

Sample

The U. S. sample was drawn from high schools in the midwest, in the northeast, in the south and in the west. The midwestern school district serves a middle-sized city with predominantly academic, farming, and agribusiness occupations. The northeast school district serves a large bedroom community for a large city. Both the northeast and mid-western school systems had less than 7% minority students. The western school district is one of the ten largest in its state serving a rapidly growing area. Minority students, mostly Hispanic, make up about 12% of the students. The southern school system is in a highly populated metropolitan county which is mainly urban with about a third of its population suburban. About 37% of students there are black and about 4% are other minorities.

The German students surveyed were from school districts located in north central and south central West Germany. The data were collected from four different school districts -- two serve large cities and their environs, and two are in smaller cities. The German sample included students in several different types of secondary schools -- 208 were in vocational schools, 212 were in gymnasiums, and 132 were in comphrehensive schools. About 3% were minorities (described as "foreigners" and probably were guest workers).

In both countries cluster sampling was used, i.e. data were collected from naturally occurring groups, in this case, intact classroom groups. The total number of surveys obtained from German students was 552 of which 325 were male, 215 were female, and 12 were unspecified. The total number of American students surveyed was 483, of whom 265 were male, 213 were female and 5 were unspecified.

Questionnaire

The original instrument was a 102-item questionnaire developed by the American researchers. It utilized a political attitude framework based on our conceptualization of political attitudes as related to political institutions, national political principles, and political participation, each having general and personal dimensions (Hepburn and Napier, 1982). The original 102-item questionnaire was pretested with both American and German students. Based on the results of the pretests, and, based on lengthy item-by-item discussions of equivalent meaning between American and German researchers, the questionnaire was reduced to 80 items. The review process involved translation and re-translation of each item and discussion of its meaning in schools and in the political context of each country. The procedure was time-consuming but necessary for assuring item equivalence and overall equivalence and validity of the test (Oppenheim & Torney, 1974; Van De Vijver, et al., 1982; Hui and Triandis, 1985).

Despite the care taken to present the same meaning in both German and English, a few items on the final questionnaire had to be dropped from the analysis because of unforeseen language-cultural problems. For example, one item, "I am in favor of having religious services in schools," was stated in German, "Ich bin für den Religionsunterricht in den Schulen." The German word "unterricht" more accurately translates as "religious instruction," not

"prayer." In German schools religious studies are allowed although prayer is not. Our German colleagues could not imagine that we meant prayer by "services," and we failed to catch the error in the back-translation.

The final 80-item questionnaire was a likert-type paper and pencil instrument with four responses: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Based on the pilot tests and suggestions in attitude research literature, we decided to offer no neutral response but to incline students to think in terms of whether they were more or less in favor, or more or less opposed, to the attitude statement (Babbie, 1982).

In the survey with U. S. students the questionnaire had an overall reliability of .852 (Cronbach alpha), and with students in the Federal Republic, reliability was similarly high with an alpha of .80.

Data Analysis

For purposes of this report twenty items concerning attitudes towards the rights of individuals have been selected for analysis. In this initial analysis, because the first data tabulations we have are in frequencies, the author decided to tabulate percentages and calculate chi square for proportions to examine differences between the West German and U. S. students. Frequencies were translated to percents, a graphic comparison of the percentages was prepared, and chi-squares for proportions were computed for percentage response distributions. Chi square is particularly appropriate for use in comparing independent data in the form of frequency counts or distributions. The chi square for proportions was selected here because samples were close in size but not exactly the same, and percentages allow for equivalence in comparisons. Also, given our large sample sizes, chi square for proportions by setting each N at 100, is a more conservative chi-square test.

Results

Results of the comparisons of attitudes on rights and freedoms are presented on Table 1, which is a continuous table of the twenty items and includes German (G) and American (A) frequencies of responses expressed as a percent of the N. The four response choices are headed ++ (strongly agree), + (agree), (-) disagree, and -- (strongly disagree). Bar graphs of responses to each item provide visual comparisons.

The expression of the general attitude or ideal that all citizens should have rights of speech, assembly, and voting (#3 on Table 1) evoked a very similar pattern of agreement from both American and German students. Also, a matched negative statement (#57) containing concrete examples showed consistency in attitudes of the German students but evoked less tolerance in American students. The differences on this item were not significant at the .01 level set by the reserearchers.

In a single item on church and state (#32) both U. S. and German students agreed that separation should be maintained, but as the graph shows, Germans were more supportive of this principle with 88% in agreement compared to 78% of the American students. The difference, however, was not statistically significant.

From another set of items on equal rignts (#14 and #66) a similar pattern of response is seen. Both German and American students agreed with the general principle, and they showed their disagreement with a negative application of the principle, i.e. restriction of voting rights to the well educated. However on both of these items, the German students were signficantly more intense and consistent in their expression of attitudes favoring equal rights.

On another rights item (#68), which is stated in the personal mode and concerns wealth and influence, there was a clearly different response pattern.

German students were significantly more inclined to assume that wealth is linked to greater political influence than were American students.

In regard to protection of rights by the courts (#1), both American (99%) and German (98%) students showed very strong support for the principle. Responses to a specific and personally stated item regarding application of the principle of equal rights to housing, education, and employment (#79), indicated that in both groups there is some erosion of support as compared to #14 and #1. This erosion is greater on the part of the Americans, but the difference between Germans and Americans is not considered significant in #79.

A general item concerning government power to protect the general welfare by regulating private property showed a significant difference in attitude responses by German and U. S. students. The German students were more emphatically opposed to this power of government. However, when stated in the personal mode (#64), and using the term "restrict" (or in German "einschranken") rather than "regulate," the difference between the two groups declined to less than signficance. Of the German students, 82% opposed restriction of personal property use as did 73% of American students.

Two items (#12 and #63) assessed attitudes toward rights to a fair trial. Both German and American students agreed with the principle (12), but the intensity of German agreement was somewhat greater (with 87% strongly in agreement compared to 67% for the U. S.) and produced a significant difference. The item concerning the fifth admendment right of the accused not to testify in a trial (#63) was far more strongly upheld by the German students than the Americans with a difference significant at .001.

On a set of questions concerning censorship (#33 and #58), the response pattern by American and German students was very similar and consistent for both. Both opposed censorhsip in principle, and both opposed censorship of

books or movies at a personal level, with American students slightly more opposed to this type of government restriction of individual rights.

Two items dealt with privacy rights and wiretapping (#4 and #70). The first dealt with wiretapping in principle as a necessary police power. It revealed no significant difference between German and American students. Both groups showed majority support for its use by police. But 45% of American and 38% of German students were not convinced that it is necessary. When wiretapping was presented in personal terms (#70) there was a strong negative shift in attitudes by both German and American students. American students (81%) and German students (82%) opposed telephone wiretapping if it affected them personally.

Two items dealt with jury trials (#27 and #60). One offered a general attitude statement of citizen obligation to serve on a trial jury. It received 80% positive responses from American students and 77% from German students. However, to a **personal** statement regarding serving on a trial jury (#60), there were significant differences in the responses. German students' attitudes toward serving on a jury were mixed with a slight majority (52%) indicating that they were unwilling to take on the responsibilities for decisions about guilt or property. American students (70%), on the other hand, indicated that they would want to serve on a jury. The difference in the German and American jury systems should be mentioned here. In the Federal Republic, juries have less leeway for decision and generally defer to the judge to apply the code in the basic law. To some extent this differing concept of a jury may explain the reaction of German students to item #60.

In summary, although the pattern of response was somewhat different on a number of items, responses from American and German students were significantly different on only seven of the twenty items on rights of individuals.

Discussion

From this initial analysis of one subset of 20 attitude items on individual rights drawn from the 80-item political attitudes survey, it is evident that both German and American students are generally supportive of principles of individual rights. These findings tend to reinforce studies of the seventies concluding that both German and American youths were becoming more democratic in their values and that German youths were becoming relatively more democratic and less authoritarian.

Almond and Powell (1984) write of the "miracle" of the democratic political culture which has developed in West Germany in the seventies. As they state it, "the citizenry itself was changing -- older generations raised under authoritarian regimes were being replaced by younger generations socialized exclusively during the postwar democratic era." In our study in the German results there are several considerations of interest. Among the seven items in which there was a significant difference between the German and U.S. students, five indicate more intense support for individual rights by German students. The other two items imply significantly less German student support for 1) serving on juries and 2) political equality in regard to wealth. The differing context of jury trials may explain differences on one item. An explanation of the greater conviction, on the part of German students, that wealth and political influence are linked is not so easy. Both societies have experienced economic instability and both are in periods of national conservative leadership, perhaps the difference is attributable to the German students greater awareness of public issues and economic problems.

It should be noted that within the German data no significant differences were found in comparisons across the different types of secondary schools. Attitudes were similar for students in comprehensive schools, vocational

schools and the gymnasiums. This suggests that attitudes are the same across occupation and social class groups of German students and may be related to greater democratization in schools.

The individual rights data from the larger study suggests that students in these two societies are closer in their value patterns than they were in previous decades. The relative strength of democratic values expressed by American and German students suggests a continuation of the pattern found by Torney et al. (1975) but the difference **between** them does not seem as great. In the light of the IEA study it will be interesting to examine other subsets of our data. While IEA found that German students scored much higher on democratic values scales, they also found that they scored lower on civic interest and participation scales and lower in support for national government than did the American students. The IEA report will provide us with some attitude landmarks from a decade ago as we continue to examine our data.

From this initial analysis both German and American students appear to hold values which Barnes and Kaase (1979) call "post materialist" values (e.g., in favor of more say in government, greater freedom, and a less impersonal society) with the Germans more so than the Americans. But general/personal attitude differences indicate some value conflicts or possible compartmentalizing of attitudes. Both American and German students revealed these general/personal differences in responses which suggest "people-should, but-I-would-not" thinking. A cursory examination of other subsets of our data -- those dealing with attitudes toward political institutions, war, and political participation -- indicate that more of these I/other value conflicts will be found in the subsequent analysis. The extent to which these are greater or less for American or German students will be examined. Current conflicts between economic realities and political ideals may be at the root of

l/other splits in attitudes for students in both societies, but it may be more so for the German students who by the nature of their political culture tend to be more ideological in their thinking.

Footnote

[1]The author wishes to recognize and thank Will Cremer of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Rainer Krieger of the University of Giessen, who were responsible for the German data collection, and John Napier of the University of Georgia who assisted with the U.S. data collection.

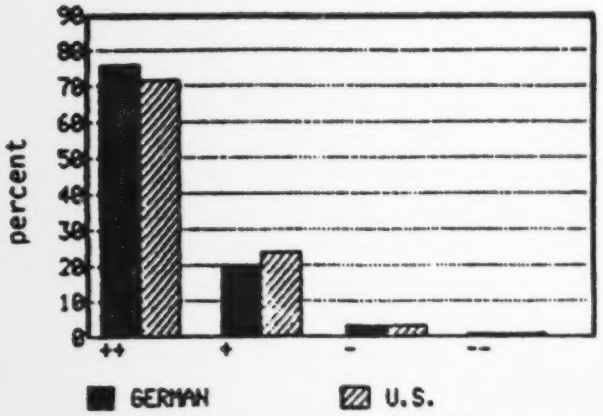
TABLE 1

RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

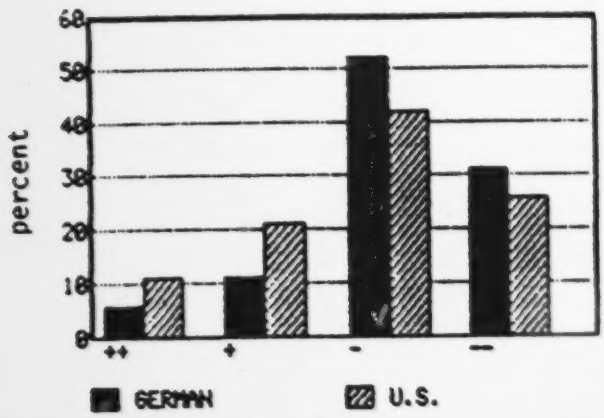
CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

(W. German N=552 U.S. N=483)

#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3)
3.	All citizens should have freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom to vote regardless of their political or religious convictions.	G	76	20	3	1	.472
		A	72	24	3	1	p = .925



57.	I would not allow certain people, such as communists or other extremists, to speak in public or to vote.	G	6	11	52	31	6.098
		A	11	21	42	26	p = .107

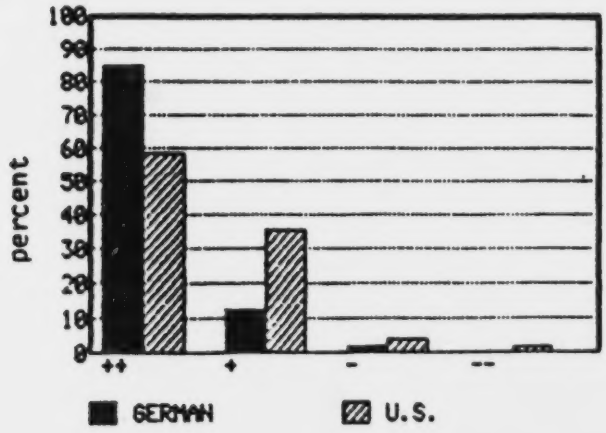


32.	Separation of church and state should be maintained.	G	45	43	9	3	3.564
		A	40	38	17	5	p = .313

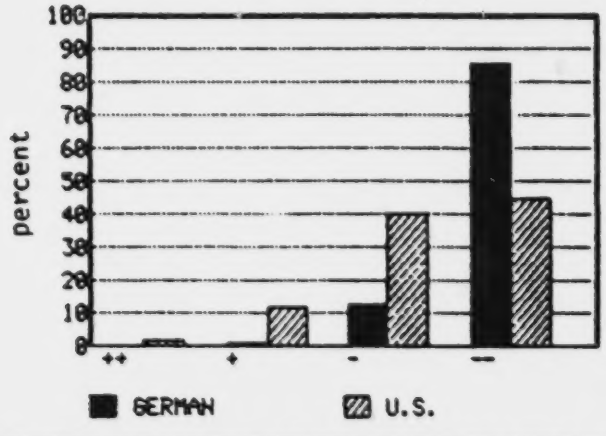
RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

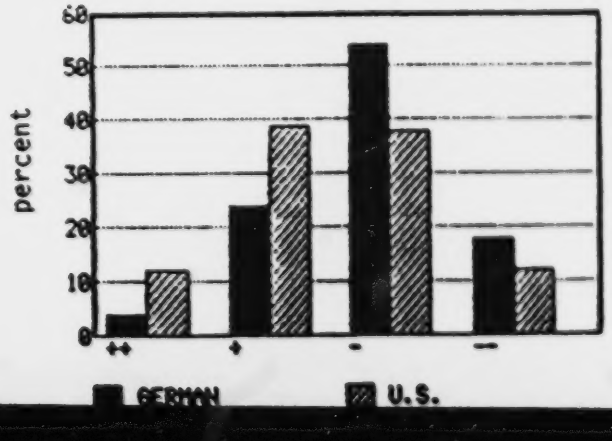
#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3)
14.	In a democracy all citizens should have equal rights.	G	85	13	2	0	18.153
		A	59	36	4	2	p < .001*



66.	I think that only well educated people should be allowed to vote.	G	0	1	13	86	37.890
		A	2	12	40	45	p < .001*



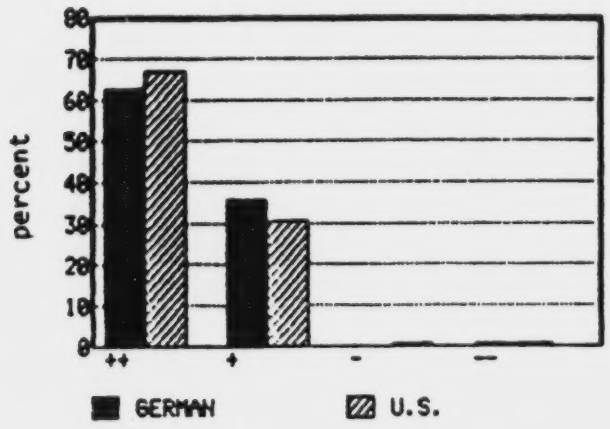
68.	If I were wealthy, I would not expect to have more political influence.	G	4	24	54	18	11.549
		A	12	39	38	12	p < .01*



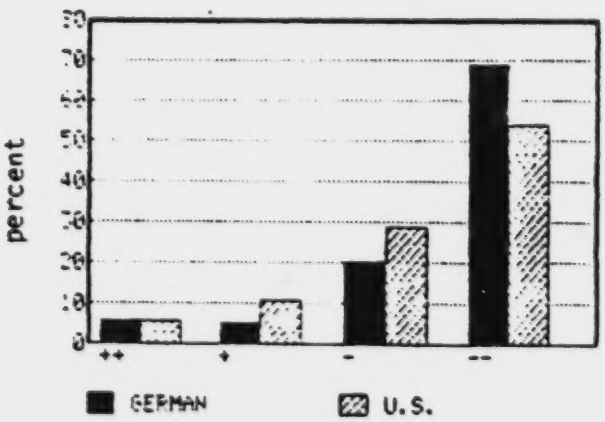
RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3)
1.	The Constitutional rights of people should be protected by federal law and courts.	G	63	36	0	1	1.496
		A	67	31	1	1	p = .683



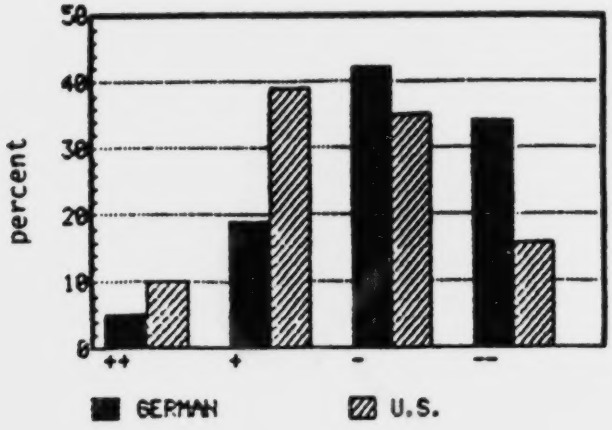
79.	I do not think people should have equal opportunity in housing, education, and employment.	G	6	5	20	69	5.732
		A	6	11	29	54	p = .125



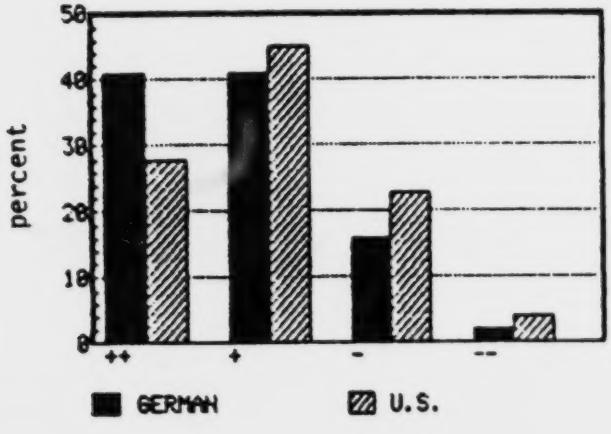
RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3)
21.	Government should be able to regulate the use of private property to protect the people.	G	5	19	42	34	15.680
		A	10	39	35	16	p < .01*



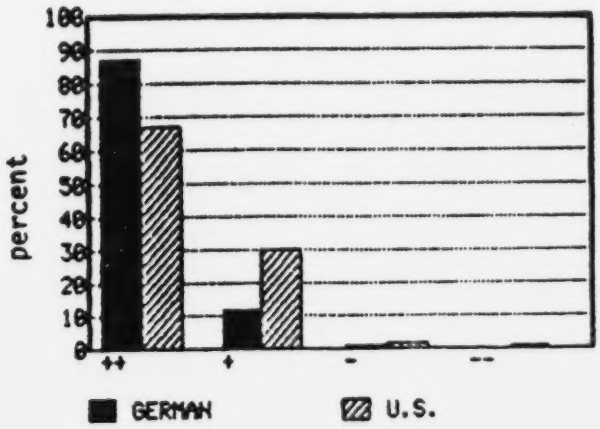
64.	I do not believe that government should be able to restrict the use of personal property.	G	41	41	16	2	4.558
		A	28	45	23	4	p = .207



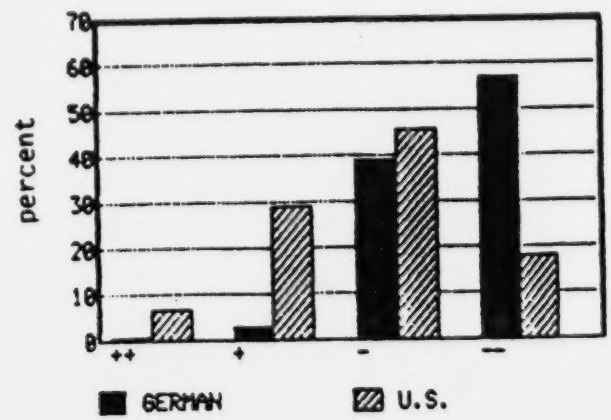
RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3)
12.	All accused persons should be guaranteed the right to a fair trial.	G	87	12	1	0	11.645
		A	67	30	2	1	p < .01*



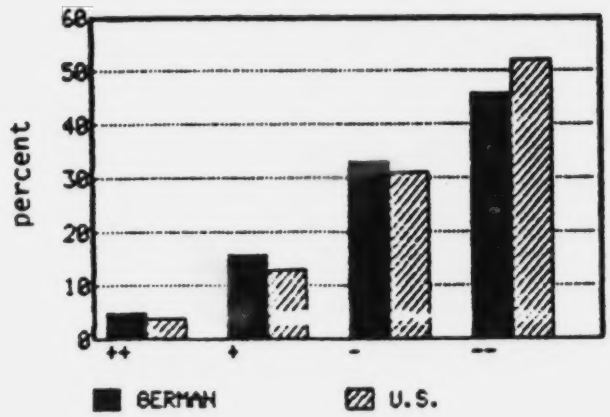
63.	Persons who refuse to testify at their own trial are probably guilty.	G	1	3	39	57	46.481
		A	7	29	46	18	p < .001*



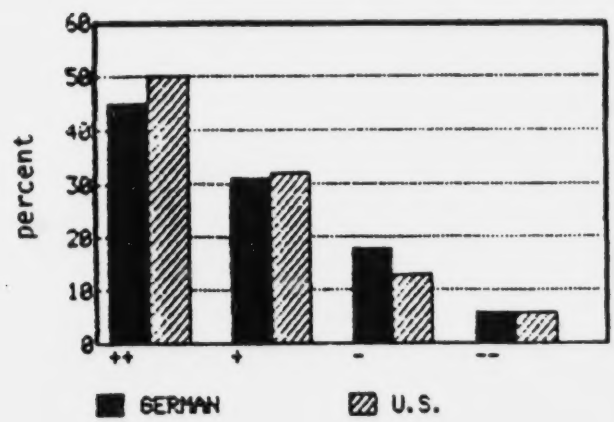
RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3
33.	Government should have the right to ban movies or books which may be offensive to the local community.	G	5	16	33	46	.851
		A	4	13	31	52	p = .837



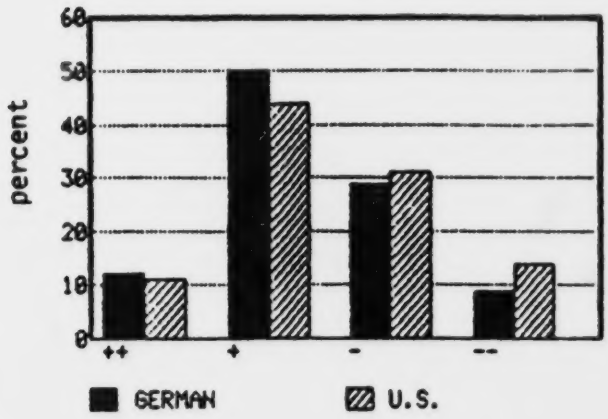
58.	I am opposed to government censorship of any books or movies which I might want to see.	G	45	31	18	6	1.081
		A	50	32	13	6	p = .782



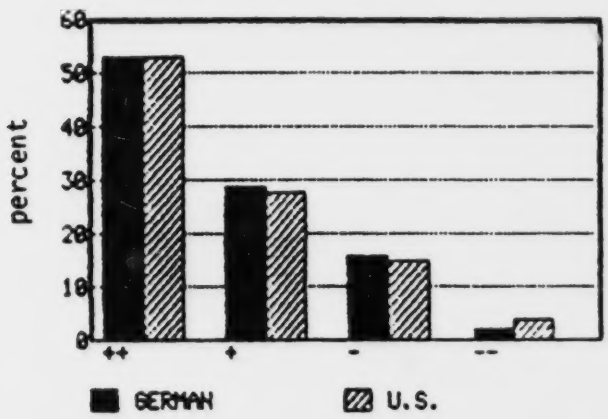
RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3)
4.	Wiretapping is a necessary police power to catch criminals and spies.	G	12	50	29	9	1.580
		A	11	44	31	14	p = .664



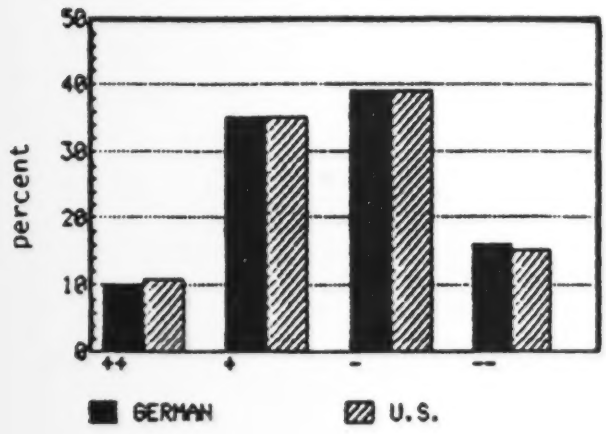
70.	Nobody should have the right to listen in on my telephone.	G	53	29	16	2	.716
		A	53	28	15	4	p = .869



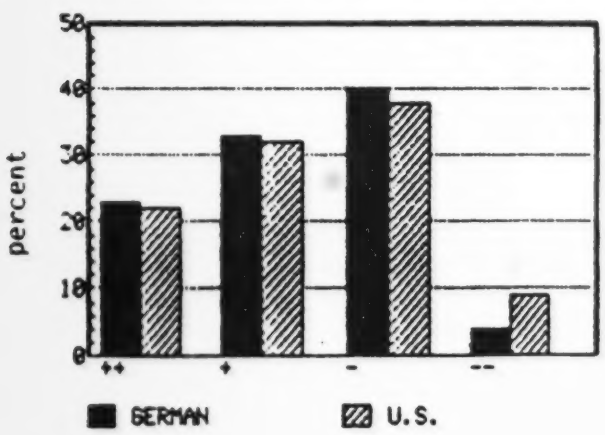
RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3)
5.	The police should conduct immediate searches of private property if illegal drugs or stolen goods are suspected.	G	10	35	39	16	.080
		A	11	35	39	15	p = .994



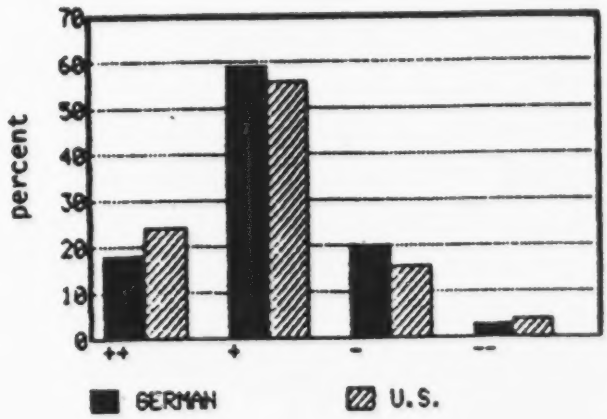
74.	I am opposed to any police search of my home or car.	G	23	33	40	4	2.007
		A	22	32	38	9	p = .571



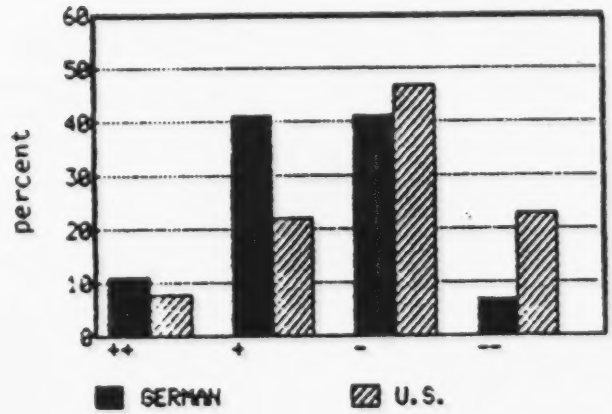
RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

CHI SQUARE FOR PROPORTIONS

#	ITEM		% ++	+	-	--	CHI SQUARE (DF=3)
27.	People should willingly serve on trial juries when summoned.	G	18	59	20	3	1.523
		A	24	56	16	4	p = .677



60.	I would not want to serve on a jury to make a decision about another person's guilt or property.	G	11	41	41	7	15.146
		A	8	22	47	23	p < .01*



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